

Message Text

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41

ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 /026 W

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O 091700Z OCT 76

FM AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 3516

AMEMBASSY CARACAS NIACT IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN NIACT IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN NIACT IMMEDIATE

INFO AMEMBASSY KINGSTON IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T GEORGETOWN 2023

EXDIS

CARACAS ALSO FOR LEGATT

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS ASEC GY TD BB

SUBJ: FONMIN WILLS TRAVELS TO PORT OF SPAIN AND BRIDGETOWN

REF: PORT OF SPAIN 2616

SUMMARY: FONMIN WILLS HAS INFORMED ME HE IS LEAVING
TOOAY TO JOIN GUYANESE TEAM INVESTIGATING THE CUBAN
CFASH. HIS MISSION IS "DAMAGE-LIMITING" ONE. HE SAID
CUBANS ARE TRYINGTO LINK CIA TO THE ALLEGED SABOTAGE.
DUE TO DEATHS OF 12 GUYANESE, EMOTIONS HERE ARE RUNNING
HIGH, BUT GOG HAS KEPT PRESS FROM SPECULATING OR INJECTING
POLITICS INTO THE MATTER. WILLS MAY HAVE WIND OF SOME U.S.
CONNECTION AS HE ASKED ME DIRECTLY WHETHER THERE WAS ANY
POSSIBLE THING THAT MIGHT LINK THE U.S. TO THE CRASH. I
SAID I WAS POSITIVE USG WAS NOT A PARTICIPANT
IN TERRORISM. FINAL PARAGRAPH OF THISMESSAGE
REQUESTS GUIDANCE ON LINK TO CARACAS LEGATT.

END SUMMARY.

1. FONMIN WILLS CALLED ME TO HIS OFFICE THIS

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MORNING (OCT 9) TO INFORM ME THAT PRIME

MINISTER BURNHAM HAD INSTRUCTED HIM TO GO TO PORT OF SPAIN AND BRIDGETOWN TO JOIN THE GUYANESE INVESTIGATING TEAM THAT DEPARTED HERE OCT 7. HE CHARACTERIZED HIS MISSION AS A "DAMAGE-LIMITING EXERCISE." IT HAD THREE MAIN PURPOSES, INCLUDING DOMESTIC GUYANESE POLITICS, CONFUSION ABOUT JURISDICTION OVER THE SUSPECTS AND THE SALVAGE OF THE WRECKAGE, AND TO BALANCE CUBAN EFFORTS TO LINK THE CIA TO THE ALLEGED SABOTEURS. HE WILL SEEK TO INTERVIEW THE SUSPECTS IN PORT OF SPAIN.

2. THE BARABDIAN GOVERNMENT REPORTEDLY WAS RELUCTANT TO ASSUME JURISDICTION WHEREAS THE CUBANS WANTED JURISDICTION OVER THE PRISONERS. WILLS SAID HIS POSITION WAS THAT BARBADOS SHOULD EXERCISE JURISDICTION BECAUSE THE ACT OF PLACING THE BOMB ON THE PLANE APPARENTLY TOOK PLACE IN BARBADOS. THE CUBANS WERE ARGUING THAT SINCE THE PLANE WAS THEIRS AND THE EXPLOSION TOOK PLACE OVER INTERNATIONAL WATERS, JURISDICTION SHOULD FALL TO THEM.

3. A SIMILAR DISAGREEMENT HAD ARISEN OVER WHO SHOULD BE INVITED TO SALVAGE THE WRECKAGE. THE CUBANS WERE INSISTING UPON BRINGING A SOVIET TEAM IN, WHEREAS THE BARBADIANS WANTED THE BRITISH. WILLS SAID HE WOULD SUGGEST THEY COMPROMISE AND INVITE THE CANADIANS TO SEND A SALVAGE TEAM.

4. THE EXTREMELY STRONG DOMESTIC EMOTIONAL REACTION TO THE DEATHS OF 12 GUYANESE IN THE CRASH HAD TURNED THE MATTER INTO A SENSITIVE DOMESTIC POLITICAL ISSUE. PEOPLE WERE DEMANDING STATEMENTS AND ACTION FROM THE GOG. (WILLS RECEIVED THREE PRESS INQUIRES AND SEVERAL OTHER PHONE CALLS ABOUT THE MATTER DURING THE 45 MINUTES I SPENT IN HIS OFFICE.) GOVERNMENT LEADERS, THEREFORE, COULD NOT APPEAR TO BE TAKING A LACKADAISICAL ATTITUDE ABOUT THE CRASH. HIS PRESENCE IN THE INVESTIGATION
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WOULD RELIEVE AND POSTPONE THE NECESSITY FOR OFFICIAL STATEMENTS OR CONDEMNATIONS.

5. WILLS SAID HE HAD PUT HIS NECK ON THE LINE HERE IN OPPOSING SPECULATION ABOUT WHO MIGHT HAVE SABOTAGED THE PLANE OR WHETHER IT WAS SABOTAGED. HE HAD TOLD BURNHAM AND OTHERS THAT HE DID NOT BELIEVE THAT THE UNITED STATES WAS INVOLVED IN ANY

WAY WITH THE PLANE CRASH. HE THEN SAID, "CAN YOU ASSURE ME THAT THERE IS ABSOLUTELY NOTHING THAT COULD LINK YOU (THE U.S.) TO THIS MATTER?" I REPLIED THAT I WAS POSITIVE NO PART OF THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT WOULD HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH THE SABOTAGE OF AN AIRLINER.

6. WILLS COMMENTED THAT BURNHAM AND HE WERE DISAPPOINTED THAT MEMBERS OF THE NON-ALIGNED MOVEMENT HAD NOT SENT MESSAGES OF CONDOLENCE TO GUYANA REGARDING THE LOSS OF LIVES. COMMENT: THIS ILLUSTRATES A GUYANESE TENDENCY TO THINK THEMSELVES AS BEING THE CENTER OF THE UNIVERSE. IT ALSO INDICATES HOW IMPORTANT GESTURES AND SYMBOLISM ARE IN DEALING WITH THEM. END COMMENT.

7. COMMENT: TO DATE THE LOCAL PRESS HAS BEEN SURPRISINGLY RESTRAINED IN NOT SPECULATING ABOUT THE POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OR ABOUT ALLEGATIONS APPEARING IN WIRE SERVICE STORIES ALLUDING TO CIA LINDS TO THE CUBAN EXILE GROUPS. THE PRESS HAS FOCUSED, INSTEAD, ON THE HUMAN INTEREST SIDE OF THE STORY, I.E. THE VICTIMS AND THEIR FAMILIES. THIS INDICATES THAT THE GOG HAS ISSUED FIRM INSTRUCTIONS THAT SPECULATION AND RABBLE-ROUSING IS TO BE AVOIDED. THUS, THE FEATURE EDITORIAL IN THE "GUYANA CHRONICLE" OCT 9 COMMENTED THAT "WHILE CIRCUMSTANCES STRONGLY POINT TO SABOTAGE, WE MUST AWAIT CONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE." ON THE THREE OCCASIONS I HAVE BEEN IN WILLS' OFFICE SINCE THE CRASH, I HAVE HEARD HIM RESPOND TO TELEPHONE INQUIRIES FROM JOURNALISTS AND FROM AMBASSADOR MANN IN WASHINGTON THAT NO ONE SHOULD JUMP TO CONCLUSIONS.

8. ACTION REQUEST: I AM CONCERNED THAT THE INFORMATION
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THAT ONE OF THE SUSPECTS ARRESTED IN PORT OF SPAIN HAD LEGATT JOE LEO'S NAME AND PHONE NUMBER (REFTEL), IF KNOWN HERE, WOULD PROVOKE AN IMMEDIATE AND ANGRY REACTION -- OFFICIAL AS WELL AS PUBLIC. I REQUEST GUIDANCE FOR USE, IN CASE THIS HAPPENS, FOR RESPONDING TO OFFICIAL AND/OR PRESS INQUIRIES.
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